MAURICE HARTE

BY T. C. MURRAY

THE ABBEY THEATRE SERIES

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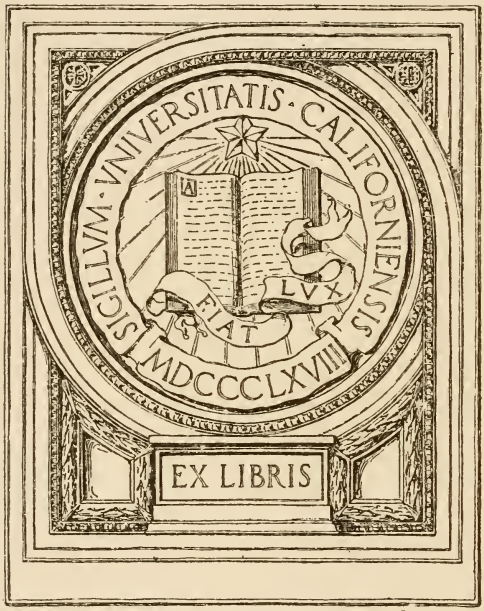

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MAURICE HARTE

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

BY T. C. MURRAY

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TO MY WIFE AND MY
LITTLE BOY AND GIRL, MY
PLAY'S FIRST AUDIENCE

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Michael Harte	*A Farmer*
Ellen	*His Wife*
Owen, Maurice	*Their Sons*
Mrs. O'Connor	*Ellen's Sister*
Father Mangan	*A Parish Priest*
Peter Mangan	*A Clerical Student*
	Another Student

The action takes place in the farmhouse of Michael Harte in the County Cork. There is an interval of about nine months between Acts I and II

MAURICE HARTE

ACT I

The afternoon of a late August. A bright, comfortable farmhouse kitchen. The sunshine is streaming in through the open door, through which one catches a glimpse of green fields and yellowing corn. Mrs. Harte is seen making preparations for ironing. She looks a cheery, robust woman, and the strongly-marked features, as well as the energy of her movements, seem to indicate some decision of character. As she puts a heater in the fire her sister comes in. Mrs. O'Connor is a thin, pale, overworked woman, but younger than Mrs. Harte.

Mrs. O'Connor (*entering*). Glory be to God, Ellen, but isn't it the wonderful weather for the country? I never saw anything like the gardens this year.

Mrs. Harte. 'Twill make a great year surely. The corn in the well-field below is already on the turn, and it always green till September.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis so. . . . I just ran over to see if you'd have a bit of darning thread to spare. I want it very badly (*producing a piece of grey woollen thread*). Anything like that would do me.

Mrs. Harte. Show me (*examining thread*). I have then, I think. (*She goes to a drawer and takes out some thread, which she compares with the pattern.*) 'Tis

nearly the very same. Take the skein of it. But sit down for a bit and be telling us the news.

Mrs. O'Connor. I can't, I'm afraid. I'm in a terrible hurry.

Mrs. Harte (*with slight asperity*). O, 'tis ever and always the same story with you, Mary. You're hardly inside the door when you're off again. Sure anyone might think 'tis black strangers we were, and not two sisters at all. (*With affected indifference.*) But have your own way—have your own way.

Mrs. O'Connor (*extenuatingly*). I don't know how it is, Ellen, but between one thing and another, I do be kept going from morning till night. The children are terrible trouble—for every kind o' wildness and crossness there's not their beating anywhere.

Mrs. Harte (*drily*). All children are the same.

Mrs. O'Connor. I don't know, then. There's Christie, now. 'Twas only yesterday I put a new pair o' stockings on him—fine, thick stockings they were, too—the same thread as that—an' glory be to God! if you only saw the state o' them when he came home from school in the evening. For all the world like a little tramp he was, with his skin out through them in half a dozen places. Running through the briery field, he said he was, playing "Hunt the Fox." (*Discontentedly.*) Sure my life is no good to me at all with them. . . . But is it any news you have yourself, Ellen?

Mrs. Harte (*more suavely*). Wisha, no, then, except that Maurice got notice this morning to be going back to Maynooth in a couple o' days.

Mrs. O'Connor. Did he so? Well, sure, he had a good share o' rest. 'Tis half tired of it he was, I'm thinking?

Mrs. Harte. It isn't indeed, then. A week longer he was expecting, and glad he'd be to get it.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, now.

Mrs. Harte. (*half confidentially*). When he opened the letter 'tis half pale he turned, and he was that disappointed he got up from the table without ever finishing his breakfast.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, well! . . . But they have a terrible hard life up there by all accounts? Sure when William Kearney's son came home after being priested, they said his mother went off in a weakness when she saw him first.

Mrs. Harte. I heard them to say so. Everyone had it at the time.

Mrs. O'Connor (*more cheerfully*). But isn't it the fine thing for ye that 'twill soon be all over for Maurice?

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis, surely.

Mrs. O'Connor (*half laughingly*). Do you know 'twas of him I was thinking, God forgive me! all the time during the Mass last Sunday?

Mrs. Harte (*laughing*). 'Tis small blame for me to be thinking of him, so.

Mrs. O'Connor (*more gravely*). Wondering I was how we'd all feel, and we seeing him coming on the altar for the first time. And look! . . . Almost as plain as you're standing there, I saw him in my mind, and he coming out the sacristy door, with the fine vestments on him, and all the little altar boys and they on before him. . . . That will be a proud day for you, Ellen, and for all of us.

Mrs. Harte. 'Twill so. But isn't it strange that I have a kind o' feel on me sometimes that 'tis how something queer 'll happen, or the heart, maybe, stop altogether on me, when I'll see him turn round to read the Acts, and everyone's eyes fixed on himself.

Mrs. O'Connor (*with solemn emphasis*). It must be the wonderful feel entirely for any mother to be looking and listening to her own son and he before her on the altar o' God for the first time. . . . May God preserve you, Ellen, to see that day!

Mrs. Harte. Wisha, Amen. 'Twould be hard on me to be called away before it.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Twould, surely.

Mrs. Harte. And I often say to myself, whenever the death'll come after, 'twont be so hard at all. 'Twould be great joy thinking of him saying the Mass for your soul, and all the priests and they chanting the great Latin, the same as if 'twas over one o' themselves. . . . . God help us, they're the foolish thoughts, I suppose, but they'll be coming into my mind when I do be awake at night, sure as the stars.

Mrs. O'Connor. An' where's the harm in them? Faith, if I had a son myself and he to be as good as priested, 'tis the same thoughts I'd be thinking. . . . (*With a slight laugh*). But do you know I do be building my own castles too, young and wild as the children are yet?

Mrs. Harte (*encouragingly*). An' sure why not? 'Tis surprising how the time'll slip by till you'll find yourself bothering your mind, and asking yourself what you'll do with this one, and that one, and the other one o' them.

Mrs. O'Connor (*confidentially*). What Diarmuid and myself was thinking was that as our Patrick had such a great head for the learning we'd try to put a little bit o' money by for his schooling, . . . (*half timidly*) and we were hoping that Maurice, maybe—after a couple o' years—knowing the road like—might—might help him along a bit?

Mrs. Harte (*in astonishment*). 'Tisn't a priest you'd be thinking of making him, Mary?

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis so.

Mrs. Harte (*decidedly*). I wouldn't at all.

Mrs. O'Connor (*taken aback*). And why so, now?

Mrs. Harte (*enigmatically*). Because I'd be advising you for your good.

Mrs. O'Connor. Oh, there should be a reason for everything.

Mrs. Harte. And there *is* a reason—and a great reason for what I am saying to you. . . . Listen, Mary. If Michael and myself have our son nearly a priest this day, 'tis no small price at all we have paid for it. Many a time I thought to be telling you, but whatever you'll tell another woman—even your own sister—she's sure to tell it to her husband, and when the knowledge of anyone's affairs passes outside the four walls of their own house, it goes here and there like the wind, with nothing to stop it at all.

Mrs. O'Connor (*protestingly*). Oh, Diarmuid isn't like that at all, Ellen!—I could give you my hand and word on that.

Mrs. Harte. I'm not saying it about him in particular. . . . Isn't it the terrible thing, Mary, every time you look through that window to have the fear in your heart that 'tis the process-server you'll see and he coming up the boreen?

Mrs. O'Connor. Yeh, glory be to God! and why so?

Mrs. Harte. Why so? . . . I'll tell you, then, soon enough.

She goes into an inner room. She returns in a moment, and from a thick wrapper of brown paper securely fastened, draws two small account books. She opens one and hands it to her sister, indicating the entry denoting the total liability. There is a look of vague wonder and curiosity on the face of the second woman.

Mrs. Harte. Look at that.

Mrs. O'Connor (*scrutinising it*). The Lord save us, Ellen!

Mrs. Harte. And look at that, now.

Mrs. O'Connor makes no comment, save closing her eyes and making the sign of the cross.

Mrs. Harte (*after a pause*). Well, now?

Mrs. O'Connor. You've put a fright in my heart that I'll never forget. . . . (*Suddenly.*) In the name o' God, Ellen, what happened ye at all, at all, and to have such a terrible load o' debt on ye?

Mrs. Harte (*drily*). What happened us? Faith, nothing at all. We couldn't help it.

Mrs. O'Connor. And in the name of all that's good and gracious, how did that mountain o' money rise on ye so? (*referring to account*s). A hundred and forty pounds on ye by James M'Carthy and Redmond Kelly, with fifty-three pounds on ye, besides!

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis little you know, Mary, or any other like you, the great money that goes to make a priest. From the first day your boy will be leaving your house for the College till he'll come back to you finished in nine years or ten years maybe, 'tis money, money, money, all the time. Shovelling it out you must be every other day.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis a fright, surely.

Mrs. Harte (*impressively*). But don't be thinking at all, Mary, that because I'd be against my own sister following my example, that 'tis sorry I am, or Michael either, for our bargain.

Mrs. O'Connor. But didn't Maurice win a share o' money in prizes and the like from time to time? Didn't I see his name on the newspapers again and again, and sure you showed me the cheques yourself?

Mrs. Harte. I did so, but they're only trifles in the end. What is a matter of five pounds or even ten pounds now and again?

Mrs. O'Connor. That's true. . . . Oh, 'tis a fright entirely, and whatever fine notions Diarmuid and myself had for Patrick 'tis cured of them for ever we are from this day out. Well, may the Lord spare Maurice to pay it back to ye on the double!

Mrs. Harte. Whisht! Whisht! Here he's up the boreen. Don't pretend anything for the world. He don't know a sign about them books. And we're keeping it from Owen as well. (*Hastily wraps up books and puts them into drawer of dresser.*)

Mrs. O'Connor. There's no fear 'twill ever pass my lips.

Mrs. Harte. Ssh! Ssh!

Maurice comes in. He is about twenty-two. His dress is the clerical broadcloth and collar of a Maynooth student in minor orders. He has remarkably large dark eyes set in the pale intellectual features of an overwrought student. His expression gives one a sense of mental unrest. He has a large volume in his hand. Mrs. O'Connor gets up ready to leave.

Maurice. Good day, aunt. 'Tisn't running off you are, surely?

Mrs. O'Connor. I left a cake in the pot-oven nearly half an hour ago, and 'tis destroyed 'twill be if I wait another minute, so you'll excuse me.

Maurice (*half indifferently*). Oh, very well, very well.

Mrs. O'Connor goes out. Maurice throws himself into a chair near the open window. Mrs. Harte goes to the table and takes the box-iron from the stand. She then goes to the fire-place, removes a heater from the fire, and inserts it in the box. She returns to the table.

Maurice. You're not going to iron, surely, on such a hot day, mother?

Mrs. Harte. Oh, 'tis only your father's shirt, and a collar or two for yourself. They'll only take me a short while.

Maurice. Even so, wouldn't it be much better to wait till the cool of the evening?

Mrs. Harte. Oh, there's no time like the daylight for making up the linen. I often tried it by candle-light, an' 'tis quite proud of myself I'd be, seeing

the collars and they so white and stiff, an' the grand gloss on them, an' maybe next morning 'tis a fright I'd get when I'd see the way they'd be. My sight isn't as good, I'm thinking, as it used to be. . . . But 'tisn't at the study you're going to be again, Maurice?

Maurice. Why not?

Mrs. Harte. They're cutting the oats above at your uncle's, and they'll be expecting you; you ought to take a walk east before the dinner, if only for the fresh air.

Maurice. Not now—not now. Later on, maybe.

Mrs. Harte. I tell you 'twould be a lot better for you than to be bending over them books. 'Tis no wonder the neighbours are making remarks about the way you're looking lately.

Maurice (*startled*). Remarks! How?

Mrs. Harte. Sure, glory be to God, you need only look at the glass to find out. Look at the colour that's on you this minute—you that used to have the fine, red, blushy cheeks. . . . Them books are killing you. Morning, noon and night you're over them.

Maurice. Oh, nonsense.

Mrs. Harte. Faith, 'tis no nonsense at all, Maurice; you'll be sorry yet. 'Tisn't much comfort your great honours will be to yourself or to us if you lose your health over them.

Maurice. I gave you credit for more sense, mother, than to mind what people say.

Mrs. Harte. And neither do I, except when they say the very thing that's on my own mind. . . . Throw them aside for this week, anyway? Sure, 'tis only a matter of a few days now till you'll be back in the College again; (*with warm conviction*) and the Lord knows 'tis plenty o' the books you'll get up there—and maybe too much!

Maurice gives a slight laugh.

Mrs. Harte (*laying down her iron*). Sure, if you don't care to take a turn east to the mowing, you might take out the little mare, as she's idle, and go for a bit of a ride up to the mountain, or you might be riding to the town to see if any letters came for you by the evening post—or be doing anything at all rather than be destroying yourself with them blessed books.

Maurice. This book, mother, I—I should like to tell you about it.

Mrs. Harte (*somewhat ungraciously*). Yeh, don't mind. To tell you the truth I'd rather a lot to see you above with the men in the corn-field, and you making diversions for them, the same as you used to be every other year. Sure, what they're saying now is that you're getting a bit proud and distant in yourself for the last year or so.

Maurice (*with a slight laugh*). *Proud!* Proud, is it?

Mrs. Harte. Sure, glory be to goodness, you used to be the life and soul o' the place when you came home every other year?

Maurice (*gravely*). If I am changed I cannot help it. Circumstances are not always the same.

Mrs. Harte. No, surely. 'Twould hardly do, I suppose, for one that's nearly a priest now, to be too —too airy like in himself? But sure, not minding that at all, 'tis enough to give anyone a pain in the heart to see the poor appetite you have lately. Your father and Owen would go through as much in one meal as you would in a month. (*Going to him.*) Here, now, throw away that book, and be off with yourself!

Maurice (*with a mirthless laugh*). Very well, very well. But you'll give me just a few minutes to tell you what I've been reading? You'll not grudge me that time, will you?

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, I haven't learning enough to

understand the things that would be in such a great book as that.

Maurice. Oh, nonsense! Why, a child could understand it. It is only a novel—a mere story—and a very simple one at that. I got it from Father Mangan.

Mrs. Harte (*surprised*). A novel, is it? An' would the priest be reading the like o' that?

Maurice. Of course. Why not?

Mrs. Harte (*innocently*). But, Maurice, sure them story-books do be all lies, and love, and the like o' that?

Maurice. This is a true story.

Mrs. Harte (*dimly curious*). Is it, now? Well!

Maurice (*uncertainly*). 'Tis about a country boy, the—the son of a farmer in middling circumstances. His name was—let me see? (*turns hastily a few pages.*) It doesn't matter about his name—but from his earliest years he was a rare lad at his books.

Mrs. Harte. Sure, and to do his best he couldn't be more gifted than you were, Maurice?

Maurice (*unheeding*). It happened one day—he was just twelve at the time—the parish priest visited the school. The teacher pressed him to examine the boy. He did so.

Mrs. Harte. Well, then.

Maurice (*after a slight pause*). Those old Jewish rabbis who listened long ago in the Temple to the wisdom of another Boy of twelve, could not have been one bit more astonished than was this parish priest. He turned to the schoolmaster in wonder. "Surely," said he, "God never put such brains into a child's head without some very good purpose!"

Mrs. Harte. Well, well. . . . But sure the bishop, when he came here for the confirmation, singled yourself out from all the rest that was there. And didn't he call over Canon O'Grady and three

other priests to hear you answering the catechism. Sure, the like was never known before or since, and everyone in the parish was talking of it. Don't you remember it?

Maurice (*mechanically nodding assent*). That evening the schoolmaster went to the boy's parents. He told them what the priest had said, and urged them to give the lad a chance—to send him to college.

Mrs. Harte. And they did, I suppose?

Maurice. They were only struggling farmers.

Mrs. Harte. Wisha, what a pity now!

Maurice. The schoolmaster was disappointed. He reasoned with them, he used every argument he could think of—he almost begged them in the end to do as he suggested.

Mrs. Harte. And they wouldn't?

Maurice. They could ill spare the money.

Mrs. Harte (*geuuinely interested*). Well! well! And what became of him?

Maurice. The priest himself came to the boy's father.

Mrs. Harte. He did, now?

Maurice. Yes, and he—he succeeded where the schoolmaster failed.

Mrs. Harte (*in surprise*). Well, now, look at that! The priests have great power surely. Sure, only for Father Mangan 'tis long till we'd think of sending yourself to the college either.

Maurice. You see, he assured the parents that their boy would practically pay his own way if they sent him for the Church.

Mrs. Harte. Father Mangan prophesied the *very same thing* about yourself. . . . And what way did he get on, now?

Maurice. Oh, very well, indeed—almost brilliantly —till—till (*he becomes slightly confused*)—let me see? Yes—till some eight or nine years had passed.

Mrs. Harte. Sure, by right he should be ordained by that time—or else he'd be very near it, judging by yourself?

Maurice. There's the sorrow of it, mother. . . . He—he was never ordained.

Mrs. Harte. Glory! he wasn't?

Maurice. No.

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, an' why so at all? 'Twasn't how he died?

Maurice. No, though it would have been better for him—a thousand times better!—if he had. He found too late he—he had no vocation.

Mrs. Harte. Well! Well! Well!

Maurice (*with hidden emotion*). He—he couldn't face home. He couldn't endure to see the disappointment of—of those who—who had built all the hopes of their life on him.

Mrs. Harte. 'Twas terrible entirely, and he to go so far. And all that was lost on him!—and his poor people only in a middling fair kind of way, you tell me, like ourselves? But what became of him?

Maurice. What became of him? He—he—I don't quite know (*he becomes nervous and confused*) —you see the—the end of the story isn't known to me yet—I'll soon be at the last chapter, . . . but I should think it will end by—by his going off to America.

Mrs. Harte. Oh, Maurice, wouldn't it be wrong of him entirely to do that? Sure the neighbours would be thinking everything queer of him—or that he did some disgraceful thing, maybe—and he not to show himself at home. And his poor people, hadn't they plenty trouble in their hearts, God help them! without that suspicion to be on their boy? 'Tis the sad story, surely. And you tell me 'tis all true.

Maurice. Too true, mother.

Mrs. Harte. Well, well, 'tis little any man or

woman knows, and they rising up in the dawn, what's between them an' the next dawn.

There is a short pause.

Maurice (*with a laugh*). Mother, if — if that happened to me—if I walked in that door to you one day with that poor fellow's story—what would you say?

Mrs. Harte (*laughingly*). Well, indeed, 'twould be very hard for me to tell that. (*More seriously.*) I suppose I'd try to say, "Welcome be the will o' God," but they'd be the hardest words, surely, that ever came out of a woman's mouth. (*Fervently.*) But thank God and His Blessed Mother this day, 'tisn't that way with us, Maurice! . . . . The poor old people, wasn't it the cruel blow entirely for them. God help us! God help us!

Maurice (*after a slight pause*). And the wretched student himself, mother?

Mrs. Harte (*lightly*). Wisha, the young get over these things in a short time. . . . But sure, it may be that he suffered his share, too?

Maurice. Suffered? Suffered, is it, mother? What agony he endured no one knows but himself and his Maker!

Mrs. Harte (*in surprise*). God help us! isn't it thankful to God people ought to be when the trouble keeps away from their doors?

Maurice (*with intensity of feeling*). Mother, he often wished he had never been born.

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, an' why didn't he go on, so?

Maurice (*in profound astonishment*). Why, surely, you wouldn't have him take Orders without a vocation?

Mrs. Harte (*drily*). Oh, sure, it might come to him in time. There's no fear but it would. God is good. 'Tis only talk about a vocation?

Maurice (*shocked*). What! *Talk—only talk* about a vocation?

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, don't take me up like that! Sure, what I only meant to say was this——

Maurice. I'm amazed at you! Why, mother, a priest without a vocation is a—a traitor to God and to man. Every priestly function he performs is, in a sense, sacrilege. He had escaped that horror, and it was that one thought alone saved him from madness. . . . Surely, mother, he did the right thing in the end? (*Appealingly.*) You think so—don't you?

Mrs. Harte. But, sure, 'twas the queer thing entirely for him, Maurice, to be going on and on like that year after year, deceiving his own an' deceiving everyone else? If he was that great scholar you tell me, wouldn't he know his own mind long before that?

Maurice. He *did* know it—he knew it well, but you see, he—he was wretchedly sensitive—constitutionally so—and he—he hadn't the courage to confess it.

Mrs. Harte (*censoriously*). Oh, sure, there was no sense at all in that! . . . (*Wonderingly.*) And would yourself be taking pity on the like of him, Maurice?

Maurice. Oh, surely, surely.

Mrs. Harte. Well, maybe you're right. 'Tis hard to be finding fault with anyone, and people shouldn't be saying anything, but be thankful to God 'tisn't their own story. . . . Listen to them calves outside. A sup o' sweet milk they're wanting. They've almost the sense of a Christian, God bless them. (*She takes a can of milk and goes towards the open door.*) The poor people, 'twas a terrible blow for them. (*As she steps outside her voice can be heard calling to the calves.*)

Maurice. Coward! Coward! Coward! Why didn't you speak? Why didn't you tell her. . . . (*He flings the book from him in self-disgust.*) I'll . . . (*rises suddenly, strides towards the door, and hesitates.*)

Yet, my God, how can I do it? (*He returns to his place, and sits down, speaking in distracted whispers.*) What shall I do! What shall I do at all? Merciful God, direct me!

He sits in troubled thought, his hands to his brow. He is in this attitude when Father Mangan appears in the doorway and walks in. Father Mangan is a bright, genial-tempered, warm-complexioned little man of about sixty-five. He has a newspaper in one hand, in the other he carries a walking-stick.

Father Mangan (*breezily*). Good-day, Maurice.

Maurice (*with a slight start*). Oh, good-day, Father Mangan.

Father Mangan (*with a twinkle*). Day-dreaming, I see?—or is it formulating a thesis for the D.D.? (*Maurice forces a smile.*) Ah, Maurice, my boy, 'tis matter for confession to be indoors on such a day as this. I shook a dozen years off my old shoulders the moment I stepped outside the hall door this morning.

Maurice (*with sudden resolve*). Strange, Father, you are the one person of all the world I wanted to see this minute.

Father Mangan. There, now, and I just wanted to see you, too. I'll expect you up about four to-morrow evening. Father John Burke is driving over, and Hackett and a few young scoundrels like yourself, to make war to the knife on those fat chickens your good mother sent up on Saturday last. . . . But you wanted to see me?

Maurice (*with earnest conviction*). 'Twas God Himself directed you here. . . . Father Mangan, I'm about to beg a great favour of you?

Father Mangan. Granted already, boy.

Maurice (*after a pause*). I'm—I'm in trouble, Father—in terrible trouble.

Father Mangan. Trouble, is it, Maurice? *You?*

Maurice. Trouble that is killing me, body and soul.

Father Mangan. God bless us, boy, don't say that! If you've been plucked for your degree, or anything like that——

Maurice. No, no! Oh, no, no! Would to God it were only something like that! . . . Oh, Father, isn't it a terrible thing to be fated to bring life-long sorrow on those whom one—one cares most for in the world?

Father Mangan (*mystified*). 'Tis, surely, boy, but I—I really don't understand what it has to do with you. What is wrong?

Maurice. Oh, everything—everything is wrong! . . . Father Mangan, God help me, I—I have no vocation.

Father Mangan (*aghast*). My God, Maurice!

Maurice (*sadly*). 'Tis true.

Father Mangan. Don't say it, boy—don't say it! 'Tis some insane delusion.

Maurice (*dejectedly*). 'Tis no delusion, Father. 'Tis only too true.

Father Mangan. Oh, nonsense, man, I won't believe it! 'Tis folly—'tis downright folly. Some absurd scruples you have that are easily got over. Why, man, 'tis out of the question at this hour.

Maurice. Father——

Father Mangan (*emphatically*). I won't listen to it! 'Tis madness!

Maurice (*quietly*). There is no use, Father. There isn't a doubt in my mind.

Father Mangan. Oh, nonsense.

Maurice. My conscience——

Father Mangan. Rubbish, Maurice, rubbish! Why every great saint in the Church had these misgivings. It is one of the best proofs of a true vocation. Those who never have these scruples make but indifferent priests.

Maurice. That may be so, Father, but——

Father Mangan. I won't listen to any "buts." My God, man, I never knew in all my experience a young fellow cut out so distinctly for the ministry as yourself! . . . Look here, Maurice (*placing his hand paternally on his shoulder*), take my advice and go down there to the chapel, and go on your knees, and talk to Him who is waiting there to comfort you. In His divine mercy He will dispel every doubt that is darkening your mind, and you'll come back to me like him who was blind and recovered his sight. Do, Maurice. . . . Do, my poor fellow.

Maurice. There is no use, Father. You don't understand the whole truth.

Father Mangan. How? How?

Maurice. 'Tisn't to-day nor yesterday I—I realized my own nature. . . . But I buried my wretched secret in my soul. . . . Those two, my poor father and mother, I thought to tell them again and again. But my heart failed in the attempt. I can defer it no longer. It must be told them this day—this very hour.

Father Mangan. I am shocked—I am simply overwhelmed. Think, boy, of the misery, the—the heartbreaking disappointment.

Maurice. Think? *Think*, Father? . . . (*Bitterly.*) Many a night have I lain down in my bed in Maynooth, and my eye and my mind never closed till I heard intoned the Benedicamus Domino.

Father Mangan (*moved*). Poor fellow! Poor fellow!

Maurice (*wistfully*). Father, you'll—you'll help me to—to break it to them?

Father Mangan. Look here, Maurice, my poor boy, I'm an old man, with an old man's life experience. Don't act precipitately. Don't, I beg of you. Let us talk it over to-night. I'm too

disturbed to reason calmly now. The mercy of God is beyond our thoughts. Wait just a little longer, boy. Make up your mind to that. You must wait.

Maurice (*half passionately*). No, Father, no! Waiting has been the curse of my life. I have waited too long. I will not wait any longer. (*Mrs. Harte is seen slowly passing the window outside.*) There! she's coming now, and I know 'tis God himself that sends her.

Father Mangan. You shall not!—You must not! To-morrow—to-night—any time but now.

Maurice. No! No!

Father Mangan (*earnestly*). Only half an hour's time? I tell you, you must.

Maurice (*doggedly*). I cannot. I will not, Father.

Father Mangan (*in low, earnest tones*). You *must*, Maurice. Look, I beg of you! If you don't, I—I shall never be your friend again.

Maurice. I don't care. I must, Father.

Mrs. Harte appears at the door. Seeing the priest, she comes in with bustling eagerness.

Mrs. Harte. Wisha, Father Mangan, and is it there you are? And, Maurice, aren't you queer not to take the priest down in the parlour? Tch! tch! tch!

Father Mangan. My dear woman, your kitchen is good enough for the Queen herself, not to mind a plain old man like Father Mangan. 'Tis a lot better than my own.

Maurice (*quiveringly*). Mother?

Mrs Harte. Well, Maurice?

Maurice. Do you think you—you could bear to hear bad news from me—very bad news?

Mrs. Harte. The Lord save us! What bad news would I be hearing at all?

Father Mangan (*striving to divert her attention*). Bad news enough for you, then, this day, and for

many another man and woman in this parish. Pork that has fallen—eh—six shillings a hundredweight, and flour that's up three shillings a sack.

Mrs. Harte (*to Father Mangan*). That's bad, surely, Father, and Michael with six pigs at the fair to-day—and the yellow meal nearly a pound a bag all along. . . . But sure, thank God, after all 'tis nothing worse!

Maurice. Mother, it *is* worse——

Father Mangan (*breaking in*). Now, couldn't you keep it from her? Mrs. Harte, it is worse. . . . Look at this paper. (*Unfolds newspaper.*) See here——butter and eggs going down, I may say, to nothing. 'Tis on account of the Australian trade——

Mrs. Harte. Oh, glory! Sure 'tis destroyed in earnest we'll all be so, Father?

Maurice (*arrestingly*). Mother——

Father Mangan (*abruptly seizing her arm*). Look! Mrs. Harte. Look over there—there beyond the well-field! Aren't those your cows in Kenny's clover?

Mrs. Harte. Oh, blessed hour!

Father Mangan. Up at the sessions you'll be again for trespass as sure as I'm alive!

Mrs. Harte (*in a state of trepidation*). Oh, we'll be destroyed entirely this time. A torment to them for heifers! Like wild deer they are for going over the bounds (*going*).

Maurice. Mother? Mother? Just one moment.

Mrs. Harte (*on the doorstep*). I'll be back in half a minute. My heart is up in my mouth with the fright.

She goes away hurriedly. Maurice sits down dejectedly. He remains silent, with drooped head. There is a pause.

Father Mangan (*going to him*). Come, come, boy, I did it for the best. Don't be offended, Maurice.

Hardened as I am I was not quite prepared to see that poor woman's desolation. . . . Come up to the house. We'll be alone there. We can thrash the whole matter out, and see what is best to be done. . . . (*Tenderly*) Come, Maurice. Come, boy. (*Maurice stands up dejectedly.*) That's right . . . That's right, Maurice.

They both go out. Mrs. Harte returns out of breath. She sits down to recover herself. Her sister comes in a few moments after. She has a grocer's parcel in her hand.

Mrs. O'Connor (*entering*). O'Brien's van that called above while I was out, and he left this for you. I thought I'd run down with it for fear you might be wanting anything that's in it (*lays down parcel*). Yeh, what's the matter with you at all?

Mrs. Harte (*half gaspingly*). Don't talk to me till —till I get my breath.

Mrs. O'Connor. The Lord save us!

Mrs. Harte (*after a pause*). Such a start! I'm not worth anything after it!

Mrs. O'Connor. The breath is gone from you altogether.

Mrs. Harte. Such a queer thing. Father Mangan, he was standing there. "Look," says he (we were talking about the rise in flour, or something), "look at your cows east there in Kenny's clover!"

Mrs. O'Connor. That was terrible—so soon again.

Mrs. Harte. I ran till I was nearly dead, there was that fright in my heart. And what do you think, Ellen?—there wasn't the sign of a cow or even one heifer out o' bounds.

Mrs. O'Connor. That was very strange entirely. . . . But he's getting a bit old, and the sight mightn't be too good with him?

Mrs. Harte. That's likely enough. He's getting

slow at the Mass, too. The years are beginning to tell on him, God bless him. But he took the heart out o' me with the fright.

Mrs. O'Connor. Faith, and no wonder. You'll be wanting to keep a good eye on them cows all the same. Once they get the taste of the young clover mad out they do be for it. . . There's a car after stopping outside.

Mrs. Harte. Michael and Owen, I suppose, that's after coming from the fair.

Mrs. O'Connor (*looking out*). Sure enough, 'tis themselves.

Michael Harte comes in. He is a fresh-faced, mild-looking man, with light blue eyes, and fair hair and beard.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis early in the day you're home, Michael. How were prices? I see you sold.

Michael. Bad then. Very bad. Everyone was complaining. A lot more people brought home their pigs than sold them.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, well, that's a bad story.

Michael. I saw your neighbour above, the Widow Carroll, about a mile outside the town, an' she bringing home her little pig again.

Mrs. O'Connor (*with feeling*). Wisha, God help us! Sure one o' the loneliest things in the world is to see a poor widow woman like that with her little donkey an' crib, an' her slip of a pig not sold, an' she coming home the long road by herself after the fair.

Michael. 'Tis so.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, the Lord send that prices will be up against the next fair. We're expecting to have a couple o' stores fattened by then. But you're killed with the hunger, I'm sure.

She goes out. Mrs. Harte, who has been busy preparing the meal, suddenly suspends her work and comes to Michael. She speaks with the eagerness of one whose

curiosity had to be repressed in the presence of a third party.

Mrs. Harte. Well, and how did you get on at all?

Michael. Middling then, Ellen. Middling.

Mrs. Harte (*disappointed*). But didn't you pay him the fifteen pounds out o' what you got for the pigs?

Michael. I did, of course. But he wasn't satisfied with that at all.

Mrs. Harte. He wasn't, is it? Wisha, bad manners to him! . . . Don't tell me you had to sign that note of his, Michael.

Michael. I had so. I held out tough as long as I could, but 'twas no use.

Mrs. Harte (*hotly*). 'Tis the bad right then, James McCarthy had to make you do that! Many the pound of our money he got for the last twenty years! . . . I'm sorry in my heart I didn't go with you, Michael. 'Tis long till he'd get you to do it and I to be there. You're always too soft and easy going. Wasn't it a good thing for him to be getting his fifteen pounds all in a lump?

Michael. 'Twas so. But, you see, he looked at it a very different way from us, Ellen.

Mrs. Harte. An' what different way could he look at it?

Michael. He made out 'twas as good as insulting him making such a small payment, and the money that's on us to be so heavy. "If you don't wish to sign that note," says he, "you needn't. It don't matter at all to me one way or the other, for before the next Quarter Sessions 'tis Andy Driscoll, the process server, will be marching up to your door." So what could I do but sign?

Mrs. Harte (*solemnly*). As long as I live I'll never again in my life take as much as one ha'porth from him!—that's as true as if I swore it. . . . (*Reproachfully.*) But 'tis your fault,

Michael, taking him so easy. That's plain to be seen.

Michael. When your hand is in the dog's mouth, Ellen, 'tis better to draw it out easy. James McCarthy knows well he can be very stiff in himself with all that money on us.

Mrs. Harte. Maybe he can, an' maybe he can't! . . . Ah, sure, you made a great mistake entirely letting him slip that rope round our necks.

Michael. Sure, what could I do?

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, couldn't you let on your hand was sprained or something like that. You're no way knowing at all, Michael. But sure 'tis idle talking when the harm is done.

Michael. Yeh, Ellen, you don't understand at all the way he went on over it. Wild out he was. And when I told how Owen would be settling down next year and a tidy fortune coming in to us, what he did was to shake his head an' say, "Live horse, Michael Harte, and you'll get grass."

Mrs. Harte. Glory be to God! One would think 'tis robbers we were! And we that never in our lives wronged anyone as much as the black o' your nail.

Michael. So, then, I thought I'd explain to him the terrible expense Maurice was to us all along, and how that would be all over next June, and, with the help o' God, a share o' money likely to be coming in to us instead of going out.

Mrs. Harte. Well, an' didn't that quieten him?

Michael. Quieten him, is it? Why, 'twas how he turned on me in a red passion. "And isn't it a scandal, Michael Harte," says he, "for the likes o' you, with your name on them books there for a hundred and fifty pounds, and you with only the grass of nine or ten cows, to be making your son a priest? The like of it," says he, "was never heard of before."

Mrs. Harte (*overwhelmed*). Glory be to God! (*Hotly.*) The bostoon! What business was it of his, I'd like to know? Jealous of us, he is! There's no fear any of *his* sons will ever be anything much! Laughing at them the others used to be and they in the college. Maurice himself that often told me. (*Reproachfully.*) But 'tis your fault entirely, Michael. You're too quiet in yourself dealing with the like of him.

Michael. Maybe so, maybe so. But I was afraid, like, it might be the means o' creating talk; and I was thinking it might do Maurice some harm with the Bishop if it came out on the papers that we were up before the judge for a civil bill.

Mrs. Harte (*reflectively*). Well, now, looking at it that way, maybe you weren't very far astray.

Michael (*encouraged*). And do you know, Ellen, I was thinking of a great way entirely out o' the trouble an' I coming home?

Mrs. Harte (*hopefully*). Wisha, maybe you were?

Michael. What I was saying to myself was, that as we're in such great want o' the money, if we tried to get Owen settled down after the harvest instead of waiting till next year. The fortune would come in just in time to meet the bill?

Mrs. Harte (*decidedly*). Oh, there's no sense in that at all.

Michael. An' why so, now?

Mrs. Harte (*with a touch of anger*). God knows, Michael, 'twill be soon enough for the two of us, after all our years, to see another woman mistress of this house!

Michael. 'Twill, sure enough.

Mrs. Harte. But 'tisn't that altogether, maybe, so much as another thing. . . . 'Tisn't once or twice I told you that I had my heart set on hearing Maurice say the marriage words over his own brother

Whatever the bill will do there'll be no marriage in this house till the ordination. 'Twas the great misfortune you to sign that note. (*With a twinge of conscience.*) But sure, you did what you could, poor man, and 'tis weak you must be with the hunger. What's keeping Owen so long?

Michael. I left him to untackle the horse, and he said he'd ride her down to the well to give her a drink. Here he is now.

Owen comes in. He looks about thirty. He is a good-looking young fellow, has a bright, ruddy complexion, and a head of crisp dark curls. There is a suggestion of soft, shy pleasantry in the expression of the eyes.

Owen (*on the doorstep*). There's old Tom Kenny walking round already to see if anything happened while he was at the fair. I hope you kept a good eye on them vagabonds of cows of ours, mother?

Mrs. Harte. Don't talk to me about them!

Owen. For the Lord's sake don't say 'tis how they went out o' bounds again?

Mrs. Harte (*in the manner of a story-teller*). I was giving a sup o' milk to the calves outside in the haggart. When I came back here who was before me but the priest himself and he conversing with Maurice. He turned to talk to me for a little bit—telling me he was about the bad prices at the markets—when something made him look out that window. "Look! Look, woman!" says he, all of a sudden, "aren't them your cows gone over the bounds' ditch?"

Michael. Almighty! that was a fright.

Mrs. Harte. The eyes spread on me, and I nearly lost my life running. But when I came to the place, sure, thanks be to God! there wasn't a cow nor a heifer but was safe inside in the rath field.

Owen. A mistake he made.

Mrs. Harte. Mary was saying 'twas how the sight was beginning to fail a bit with him. I got such a start I wasn't worth anything after it. . . . Here, sit down and be eating now. 'Tis dead with the hunger ye must be, and the two of ye on the road since daybreak. (*They sit down at the table.*)

Owen. We're in fine humour for it, I tell you, mother.

Michael. 'Tis seldom now I felt so hungry before.

They begin the meal and have eaten only a mouthful when Father Mangan appears in the open doorway.

Mrs. Harte (*apologetically*). There's bother for you now, Father Mangan, coming back for your stick. I was going to send it up by Owen the minute he was done.

Father Mangan. Oh, thanks, thanks. I quite forgot I had left it here.

Michael and Owen rise from the table.

Father Mangan. Sit down—sit down, Michael. Sit down, Owen. Don't let me disturb you.

Owen. We were just finished, Father.

Michael. I could hardly eat another bite if I was paid for it.

Father Mangan. Oh, very well, then, very well. . . . I just ran down to see yourself and Michael on—a little private matter. (*Owen goes out.*)

Michael (*handing him a chair*). Sit down, Father.

Father Mangan. Thanks, Michael, thanks.

He sits down. There is a slight pause.

Father Mangan. As I was coming along the lane up to the house do you know what I was puzzling at? Trying to reckon the years that have passed since I stepped inside this door.

Michael. 'Twould be no small share o' time, I'm thinking, Father.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis I can tell that, for 'twas the very night Maurice was born. Twenty-two years this Michaelmas it is. You remember we had to send for you to baptise him in the house—the women thought he'd die he was such a weak little bit of a child—and you were only in the parish since that morning.

Father Mangan. That's so. I quite remember now. (*There is another pause.*)

Michael (*smiling*). You put the good hand on him that night, Father?

Mrs. Harte. Michael never said truer words. 'Tis often on my two knees I thank God that sent you to us, for only for you, Father, 'tis a common boy working on the farm Maurice would likely be this day.

Father Mangan (*enigmatically*). Maybe, Mrs. Harte, it would have been better for him—and better for you—and better for us all?

Michael (*protestingly*). God bless us, Father, don't say that at all! We don't deny the money came a bit heavy on us all along—but sure that's as good as over now.

Mrs. Harte (*suspiciously*). Father Mangan, someone with a long tongue is after telling you about Michael signing that note in the town to-day. . . . Don't be thinking, Father, that either one or the other of us is ever regretting the bit o' money that's lost on Maurice, or is anything but thankful to God this minute that we followed your advice.

Michael. 'Tis the truth she's telling you, Father.

Father Mangan (*passing his hand uneasily over his brow*). I believe you, but—but——

Mrs. Harte. Sure—not interrupting you, Father, 'tis many a strong farmer in your parish puts his name to a note as well as Michael. And Owen's

wife will be bringing in a decent fortune next year, so there's no fear the thought of it will ever come between us and our night's rest.

Michael (*earnestly*). To tell you the honest truth, if it was twice as much expense he was we'd still be more than thankful to ourselves.

Father Mangan. I know that, Michael, I know, but——

Mrs. Harte (*impressively*). Father Mangan, I'm a strong healthy woman, with a healthy woman's appetite, and yet I could live for the rest o' my days on a bit o' bread and a sup o' sour milk for the wonderful joy that comes rushing down on me night and day, and I thinking of him a priest of God like yourself.

Father Mangan (*hesitatingly*). One—one can never be sure—quite sure, Mrs. Harte.

Michael. That's true, then. 'Tis many a man and woman that's called away in nine months or ten.

Mrs. Harte (*optimistically*). Oh, God is good. The Hartes were always a long-lived family. Michael's father here—the Lord have mercy on him!—was over ninety when he died, and his mother, God rest her soul, was long past eighty, and 'twas just the same with my own people. Maurice has the tough, wholesome breed in him, Father, and that's everything.

Father Mangan (*awkwardly*). Yes—yes, but—but, you see, there are possible accidents—accidents of another nature that sometimes befall those—those going for the Church. Many a young man has discovered almost on the—the very threshold of his ordination, that he has no real vocation.

Michael (*with conviction*). They must be *bad*, Father, and to be like that!

Father Mangan. Oh, no! no! no! Don't think that at all, Michael. It is quite otherwise.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tisn't for a mother to be saying it, Father, but sure Maurice is a born saint if ever there was one.

Father Mangan. He is, but he has one fault, poor fellow.

Mrs. Harte (*taken aback*). Has he, now?

Father Mangan. A very grave fault.

Michael. Yeh, Father?

Mrs. Harte. Is it Maurice, Father?

Father Mangan (*after a pause*). 'Tis a good thing for any son to love his parents, and to feel for them. 'Tis a bad thing for a son to love and feel for them so intensely that he fears to—to tell them of a disease that is eating his heart in secret.

Mrs. Harte (*vaguely uneasy*). Is there anything wrong with Maurice, Father?

Father Mangan. Wrong?

Mrs. Harte. For the love o' God, if there is, tell us!

Father Mangan. The two of you must promise me first——

Michael. What bad news have you, Father?

Mrs. Harte (*trembling*). Father, Father, don't keep me in this state! What's wrong with Maurice?

Father Mangan (*after a slight pause*). I'm sorry to tell you he's not returning to Maynooth. He has asked me to break it to you. He has no vocation.

They look at him in stupefied amazement. There is a painful pause.

Mrs. Harte (*hoarsely*). 'Tis not true, Father.

Father Mangan. It is, indeed, poor woman—only too true.

Mrs. Harte (*crushed*). A Mhuire! Mhuire! Mhuire!

Father Mangan (*deeply moved*). God help ye, poor people, I'm sorry in my soul for this!

Mrs. Harte (*in a high note of despair*). A Mhuire! Mhuire! Mhuire!

Father Mangan. Don't, Mrs. Harte, don't. You must try to be more patient. . . . Think of Mary and her Seven Sorrows.

Mrs. Harte (*wildly*). Don't give me any of that talk, Father, and my heart breaking! What did we ever do to God that He should give us this blow?

Michael (*gently*). Whisht, Ellen, whisht.

Mrs. Harte. The curse o' the Lord is on this house this day! . . . (*In sudden desperation*). You must make him go back, Father! For the love of Christ you'll do it. Won't you? Won't you?

Father Mangan. I have already done all that any man could do.

Michael (*piteously*). Talk to him again, Father?

Father Mangan. There is no use, Michael. His mind is finally made up. There is no moving him. You might as well try to move that mountain beyond.

Mrs. Harte (*in a strained, unfamiliar voice*). Do you know what it is you're saying at all, Father? Would you kill us dead this day?

Father Mangan (*raising his hand as if to reason with her*). Mrs. Harte——

Mrs. Harte (*hysterically*). No! No! I won't believe it! I won't, till I hear it from his own two lips.

Father Mangan (*persuasively*). Mrs. Harte——

Mrs. Harte. I won't! I won't! I won't! He couldn't do it—he couldn't! You don't know him as we do. He couldn't—No! No! No!

Father Mangan. Don't blind yourself with false hopes. 'Tis very hard, I know, but God has His own wise ends in everything. . . . Take the poor fellow gently. 'Tis wrong, remember, to interfere in such a matter. God comfort you both this day.

He goes out slowly. They sit in dreary silence. There is a long pause.

Mrs. Harte (*with a sob*). Oh, Michael, Michael,

isn't it terrible, terrible, altogether! . . . The Lord in Heaven pity us, 'tis the cruellest blow He ever sent on any man or woman since the beginning o' the world!

There is another pause. Owen returns.

Owen (*entering.*) Upon my word I thought he'd never go. (*Seating himself at table.*) I'm dead out with the hunger.

They return no answer.

Owen. What's the matter at all?

Mrs. Harte gives a broken sob.

Owen (*wonderingly*). In the name o' God what's wrong with ye? What is it, father?

Michael. Your brother that says he won't go back to Maynooth any more.

Owen. Good God!

Michael. He sent the priest to tell us.

Owen. And, in God's name, why? Why, father? What happened him at all?

Michael. Nothing. He says something about not having a vocation.

Owen. Upon my soul, that's the strangest thing I ever heard in all my life! 'Tis mad he must be. Sure no man in his right senses would think o' doing the like o' that. Here he is himself.

Maurice comes in deadly pale. Michael remains with his back turned to him. Mrs. Harte sits with drooped head, her apron to her eyes. She gives a stifled sob.

Maurice (*quiveringly*). Mother? . . . Father?

They give no answer.

Maurice (*distressfully*). For God's sake don't let me see you like that. I can't bear it. 'Twill set me mad.

Michael (*after a short pause*). 'Tisn't true, Maurice?

Maurice. It is, father. I would to God it weren't so.

Mrs. Harte (*rising with the air of one who has formed*

a desperate resolution and going to him). And with the help o' God it won't be so either, Maurice. (*Persuasively*). You'll go back again? You will, Maurice? You will, boy?

Maurice (*bracing himself*). There is no use. I cannot.

Mrs. Harte. But why? Why, Maurice?

Maurice. There is no use explaining. You would not understand. It is a matter of conscience.

Mrs. Harte (*striving to subdue her feelings*). Look here, Maurice. I don't understand that kind o' talk at all.

Michael (*with affected incredulity*). Yeh, Ellen, 'tis only a passing notion he's got, you'll find. 'Twill be gone out of his mind like a bad dream to-morrow morning.

Maurice. God help me this hour! I thought he made everything plain for you. He promised he would. . . . (*With impressive deliberation.*) Listen to me. I can never go back. *Never.* It's impossible. . . . (*They look at him imploringly.*) Don't ask me. Dont, don't, I beg of you.

Michael (*gravely*). Maurice, would you break our hearts?

Maurice. Father, would you have your son live a life of sacrilege? Would you, father? Would you?

Mrs. Harte. That's only foolish talk. Aren't you every bit as good as the next?

Maurice. I may be, but I haven't a vocation. . . . God has spoken to me in my soul.

Mrs. Harte. In the name o' the Lord, boy, what kind o' talk at all is that? Aren't you that was ever and always so good and graceful as likely to make as good a priest as Father Kelly over any day? And wouldn't one like you, with all the wonders you did at the learning, make a better priest than many another of them?

Maurice. That's only a mother's opinion. . . . My mind is finally made up.

Mrs. Harte. Maurice, listen to me—listen to me!

Owen (*restrainingly*). Ah, let him alone, mother; let him alone. What's the use?

Mrs. Harte (*passionately*). What's the use, Owen? What's the use? Is it out o' your mind you are to ask? If it went out about him this day isn't it destroyed for ever we'd be? Look! the story wouldn't be east in Macroom when we'd have the bailiffs walking in that door. The whole world knows he's to be priested next June, and only for the great respect they have for us through the means o' that, 'tisn't James M'Carthy alone, but every other one o' them would come down on us straight for their money. In one week there wouldn't be a cow left by us, nor a horse, nor a lamb, nor anything at all!

Owen (*incredulously*). Yeh, not at all, not at all. . . . Leave him alone.

Mrs. Harte. Leave him alone, is it? If I will 'tis you'll have the good cause to regret it! . . . Look at them books (*producing the two account books from drawer*). 'Tis about time you should know how we stand here.

Owen (*staggered*). Is—is this the way 'tis with us?

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis so, and if your brother is going to bring the bailiffs to this house, tell me who's the girl would be willing to walk in here ever after with a fortune? Not Bride Burke, anyway—much as she thinks of you. (*To Maurice.*) God knows, I wouldn't be hard on you at all, but look at the great load o' money that's on us this day, and mostly all on your account.

Maurice. Mother, don't make my cross harder to bear.

Mrs. Harte. An' would you be seeing a heavier

cross put on them that did all that mortal man and woman could do for you?

Maurice. Look! I'll wear the flesh off my bones, but in pity spare me?

Mrs. Harte (*bitterly*). And will you have no pity at all on us and on Owen here, that have slaved for you all our lives? And will you have no pity either on your three brothers who sent home, for your sake, the money that they earned in sweat and hard labour in the city of Boston? And, Maurice——

Maurice. Don't, mother, don't, I beseech you.

Mrs. Harte. Will you be talking wild, frightening, foolish talk about your conscience, and not think at all of them, nor of us, and all we done for you?

Maurice (*distressfully*). Mother! Mother!

Mrs. Harte. You'll go back? 'Tis only a mistake?

Maurice. Great God of Heaven! . . . you'll kill me.

Michael. You'll go back, Maurice? The vocation will come to you in time with the help o' God. It will, surely.

Maurice. Don't ask me! Don't ask me!

Owen. 'Twould be better for you, Maurice. 'Twould surely.

Mrs. Harte (*passionately*). If you don't how can I ever face outside this door or lift up my head again?

Maurice (*piteously*). Mother!

Mrs. Harte. How could I listen to the neighbours making pity for me, and many a one o' them only glad in their hearts? How could I ever face again into the town o' Macroom?

Maurice. Oh, don't!

Mrs. Harte. I tell you, Maurice, I'd rather be lying dead a thousand times in the graveyard over at Killnamartyra—

Maurice (*with a sudden cry*). Stop, mother, stop! . . . (*There is a tense pause.*) I'll—I'll go back—as—as you all wish it.

He sinks into a seat with an air of hopeless dejection.

Michael (*drawing a long deep breath*). God bless you, boy, for that! I knew you would.

Owen. 'Tis the best thing, surely.

Mrs. Harte (*kneeling*). Oh, thanks be to the Almighty God and His Blessed Mother this day!

ACT II

Nine months later. The same scene. The new window-screens and the general air of things suggest preparations for some event of unusual importance. The rich light of a late afternoon fills the room, but very gradually fades as the action progresses. Mrs. Harte is engaged darning a man's sock when her sister comes in.

Mrs. O'Connor (*eagerly*). I ran over to know if ye've settled with them. I couldn't do a stir o' work with thinking of it.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis all settled now, thank God, only the writing of the marriage papers, and if everything goes all right 'tis more than likely they are done by this.

Mrs. O'Connor. That's great.

Mrs. Harte. Michael and Owen they're to meet the other parties in the town to-day. Eleven o'clock they were to be in Mr. Shannon's office. . . I'm getting a small bit uneasy. They were expecting to be home a good while before this. You didn't see any sign o' them and you coming down?

Mrs. O'Connor. No, then. But 'tis early yet, and they'd be in no great hurry having the long day.

Mrs. Harte. What I'd be afraid of is that her people might be changing their minds since last night. (*With a sigh.*) A person can't make sure of anything at all in this world.

Mrs. O'Connor. That's true. But didn't they seem agreeable like about the settlement?

Mrs. Harte. Oh, there was no bother at all about

that—they agreed to everything at once. 'Tis very thankful to themselves they seemed to be and they leaving.

Mrs. O'Connor. Oh, sure, that's enough! Well, hadn't ye the wonderful luck to meet them? She's a grand girl, and by all accounts she's every bit as good as she's graceful. 'Tis blessed you'll be with her, Ellen.

Mrs. Harte. Wisha, I don't know. 'Tis a lonely thing for a woman after all her years to be giving up everything to the stranger.

Mrs. O'Connor. It is, sure enough.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis a hard thing, Mary, to be depending on your own son's wife for the handful o' flour, and the bit o' butter, and the drop o' milk, and all the things that used to be ever an' always your own.

Mrs. O'Connor. Yeh, I wouldn't be looking at it that way at all.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis very easy to talk.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, of course——

Mrs. Harte. Whatever you say or think, Mary, 'twill be the big change here.

Mrs. O'Connor. But sure, whatever'll happen won't Michael an' yourself have a warm room to yourselves always, an' your own share of butter an' milk, and a small bit o' money every year according to the settlement? And in a couple o' years time, when ye'll be getting the pension, sure 'tis as stiff as themselves the two of ye can be.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis the queer feel for all to have only the right to one room in the house that was yours for over forty years.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis, of course, but when a girl has the decent drop o' blood in her like her that's coming here, 'tisn't much a person would notice the change at all.

Mrs. Harte. Maybe so. I don't know.

Mrs. O'Connor (*argumentatively*). When yourself walked in here, Ellen, and Michael's own mother before you—God rest her soul!—what difference did it make for her?

Mrs. Harte. That's true.

Mrs. O'Connor. This girl of Owen's, you'll find, she's just like one of ourselves.

Mrs. Harte (*more optimistically*). Oh, I must say I liked her greatly. She was as nice and as friendly as anyone could be, and she didn't go asking questions about one thing or another, or finding fault with this or that, as many another would do. I took to her very much, somehow, though there was a kind o' pain in my heart all the time.

Mrs. O'Connor (*dismissing the argument as settled*). You needn't say another word about her now! What you tell me is enough. 'Tis a little thing shows what kind people are.

A pause. Mrs. Harte goes to the door, looks towards the high road, shading her eyes, and returns. She seems slightly anxious.

Mrs. O'Connor (*taking up the thread of the conversation again*). And Owen seems to be gone about her altogether?

Mrs. Harte (*with a gesture of scorn*). Yeh, don't bother me with him! Wild out he's about her. I never saw anyone so foolish out and out. 'Twould upset a person.

Mrs. O'Connor. I always said 'twould be that way with him, he has that nice soft *grauvar** way with him. When he takes a turn east the children do be wild about him, and you'd see one o' them, maybe, an' they riding his knee, and another, maybe, climbing up his back, and the little fist of him stuck

* Gráðach—affectionate.

in his curls, and 'tis a hundred miles away they'd keep from their own father. (*Sighing.*) 'Tis often I thought how different they were.

Mrs. Harte. 'Twouldn't do for the father to be too easy with them.

Mrs. O'Connor. Maybe so. But 'tis bad to be too severe. 'Tis only wild it makes them. . . . But about Owen, is it true about his people-in-law having the big connections?

Mrs. Harte (*with unconscious pride*). 'Tis so. Dr. Burke over at Carrigdonal is a first cousin of her own.

Mrs. O'Connor (*surprised*). Her first cousin, is it?

Mrs. Harte. Owen has her own word for it.

Mrs. O'Connor (*much impressed*). Well, well!

Mrs. Harte. But for all that, Mary, don't you think, between ourselves, that the Burkes haven't the worst o' the bargain at all?

Mrs. O'Connor (*dubiously*). They haven't, of course. . . . But 'tis a fine fortune, all the same, coming into a place like this, that's not over big altogether.

Mrs. Harte. I don't know, then. I don't think so at all.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, then.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tisn't a penny more than we were expecting. An' tis all wanted, as you know yourself. 'Tis only right that Owen should get a fair start after his time.

Mrs. O'Connor. Oh, sure, of course.

Mrs. Harte. If the farm isn't too big sure 'tis nearly a freehold since we went into the Land Court?

Mrs. O'Connor. That's true, but for all now, Ellen——

Mrs. Harte (*nettled*). Isn't a tidy bit of a place like this, with only a trifle of rent on it and every spade of it in good heart, a sight more profitable than a

hundred acres o' mountainy land, the like o' that yourself have above?

Mrs. O'Connor. Maybe you're right and maybe—— (*pulling herself up*). Well, we won't fall out over it. . .

The heavy rumble of a farm cart is heard.

Mrs. O'Connor. See, they weren't too long after all.

Mrs. Harte hurries to the door and looks out eagerly.

Mrs. Harte (*disappointed*). Oh, wisha! wisha! . . .

Mrs. O'Connor. What's the matter?

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis only Donal Murphy. . . (*Hailing someone at a distance.*) Hey, Donal.

The car jogs on a moment, then stops.

A Voice (*answering*). Hey?

Mrs. Harte. Would you see Michael on the road home? And Owen?

A Voice. I passed them a short while ago. A bit west o' the cross.

Mrs. Harte. Thanks, Donal.

The car is heard moving on.

Mrs. O'Connor. Your mind is at rest now. . . . And the wedding, is it settled that 'tis Maurice himself—— Oh, sure, I knew there was something on my mind to tell you.

Mrs. Harte. Was there so?

Mrs. O'Connor (*effusively*). Diarmuid that was telling me last night after he coming from the funeral. An O'Brien man from near Millstreet that came over to him and he in the graveyard. "I'm told," says he to Diarmuid, "that your wife's a near friend of young Mr. Harte that's up with my son in Maynooth."

Mrs. Harte (*deeply interested*). Yes, faith.

Mrs. O'Connor. "Well," said he, "I had a letter from my son three or four days ago, and he mentioned in it that the young man had bested every blessed one o' them at the examinations. 'He's such a wonder at the learning,' says he, 'that they're all

thinking 'tis most likely he'll be something very high —a bishop or something, maybe, one day, if God will only spare him the health.' "

Mrs. Harte (*breathless*). The Lord be praised! . . . (*Suddenly.*) And for God's sake, Mary, why didn't you run down straight an' tell us?

Mrs. O'Connor. Sure I would, but that ye were all in bed. Diarmuid had a small share o' drink taken, and he fell asleep in the settle shortly after coming in. 'Twas only when he woke up near ten o'clock, and the two of us were having a sup o' tea by ourselves that he told me. There wasn't the sign of a light down here then. . . Isn't it great?

Mrs. Harte (*after a pause*). And, I suppose, there's no doubt of it, Mary?

Mrs. O'Connor. Yeh, glory be to God, what reason could a stranger like that have for telling lies? A fine respectable looking man he was too, Diarmuid said.

Mrs. Harte (*fervently*). Thanks be to the good God for everything!

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis wonderful, surely. And is it settled and all that 'tis himself is to marry them?

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis so. . . . I can't get that news out o' my head. We had a letter from him only a week ago, and he'll be down. I'll show it to you. (*Stands on stool to take letter from shelf.*) 'Tis wonderful—wonderful entirely. Wasn't it great luck, now —Diarmuid to be at the funeral? (*Searching for letter.*) I thought I put it there in the clevy. That's queer, surely. (*Giving up search.*) Telling us he was about all the goings on an' the great ceremonies that'll be at the ordination next Sunday. He sent two cards—tickets like—for his father and the priest. (*Resumes search again.*) I'd nearly swear I put it there under the tea-drawer. (*Gets off stool again.*)

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis somewhere about, you'll find.

Never fear but 'twill turn up. Michael might be after taking it, or Owen?

Mrs. Harte. Maybe so, then. I wouldn't mind the letter only for the two cards. I'd be afraid 'tis how they wouldn't let Michael in at all to the ceremonies, and he not to have his own. His name was on it and all.

Mrs. O'Connor (*astonished*). But you don't tell me that Michael is going up after all?

Mrs. Harte. He is so—himself and Father Mangan.

Mrs. O'Connor. Glory! An' what made him change his mind at all, an' he so stubborn like against going all along?

Mrs. Harte. Myself, then, an' no one else.

Mrs. O'Connor (*admiringly*). Well, well, you're great, Ellen! 'Tis long till I could get Diarmuid to do a thing like that for me, and he to have his mind made up like Michael. (*Half confidentially.*) Terrible black an' stubborn he is in himself. How different the men do be.

Mrs. Harte. They do, then, but I tell you 'twasn't too easy at all to persuade Michael into it, quiet as he is in himself.

Mrs. O'Connor. Well, then.

Mrs. Harte (*confidentially*). Terrible shy and backward like he felt he'd be up there with the crowds o' strangers—an' the priests an' bishops—and all their eyes on himself, maybe.

Mrs. O'Connor (*sympathetically*). Wisha, no wonder at all. I'd be half frightened like, myself. Sure, the morning we have the Stations in the house I can't eat a sign and the priest at the table. And up there 'twill be a show for grandeur.

Mrs. Harte. Well, whatever way he'll pull along, sure 'twould be nothing short of a disgrace for Maurice not to have one of his own there besides the parish priest.

Mrs. O'Connor. Oh, 'twouldn't do at all.

Mrs. Harte. He's bringing the new suit with him to-day, and a top coat—he'd be wanting them, anyway, for the wedding; and I tell you when they'll be on him, Mary, 'tis more respectable he'll look, maybe, than many another one o' them next Sunday. But he's terrible shy.

Mrs. O'Connor. Yeh, not at all. I never noticed it.

Mrs. Harte. He is, then. Look! I'm as sure as you're sitting there, 'tis glad in his heart he'd be if the clothes wouldn't be finished to-day. 'Twould be the finest excuse in the world for not going, and no blame to be on himself at all. They're coming now, I think. That's like the car. (*Hurries to the door and sees Owen. Calls eagerly.*) Owen, come here a minute. Hurry! (*He comes to the door beaming.*)

Mrs. Harte (*anxiously*). Well, and did ye meet them?

Owen. We did, of course.

Mrs. Harte. And is everything settled?

Owen. 'Tis so, mother, and well settled. (*Smiling.*) Everything now but the words o' the Church. I hope Maurice 'll take good care to have them off an' no mistake.

They move from the doorway into the kitchen.

Mrs. Harte (*to Mrs. O'Connor, eagerly*). Everything is settled now, Mary, he tells me—the writing an' all.

Mrs. O'Connor. That's grand news, entirely! (*To Owen.*) 'Tis wonderful luck you have, Owen, by all accounts, and (*shaking hands*) I hope 'twill thrive with you.

Owen. Thank you for the good wish, aunt.

Mrs. O'Connor (*banteringly*). And tell me, how did herself look to-day, Owen?

Owen (*smiling*). Oh, lovely—lovely, altogether.

Mrs. O'Connor. I always said you had the bit o' taste. But some o' the neighbours will be having your life for going outside the parish for the mistress.

Owen (*radiant*). When they'll put their eyes on her once they'll forgive me. If Bride was only like one o' themselves 'twould be different.

Mrs. Harte (*impatiently*). Yeh, hush up that kind o' talk and have a bit o' sense! (*Anxiously.*) Tell me, did your father get his clothes?

Owen. They're outside in the car by him.

Mrs. Harte. That's the greatest relief to my mind. And the top-coat, did he bring it with him?

Owen. He did, faith, an' the hat, an' the collar an' tie, and all the rest o' the tackling as well.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis the proud man he must be this day with one of his boys going to be priested, and the other making a great match—and all nearly within the one week!

Owen (*laughing*). I don't know then about that. Faith, anyone would think and we coming home that 'twas to the gallows he was going. (*Half-confidentially.*) Now and then you'd see him and he giving a kind o' side-look at the parcels, and when we were passing over Carrigaphooka Bridge I think 'twas half on his mind to fling them over into the river.

Mrs. O'Connor (*sympathetically*). Wisha, the poor man. (*Michael appears at the door.*)

Owen. Ssh!

Michael comes in moodily. He is laden with parcels. Mrs. Harte hastens to relieve him of some of them. She lays them on the table.

Mrs. Harte. So everything is all right?

Michael. 'Tis so.

Mrs. Harte. An' short as you were away 'tis the great news we have before you.

Michael (*curious*). Great news, is it?

Mrs. Harte. Mary, that's just after telling me.

Diarmuid that had it last night for her after coming from the funeral. Some man from the West, it seems, that came up to him in the graveyard——

Mrs. O'Connor. An O'Brien man from near Mill-street, he was, Michael.

Mrs. Harte (*continuing*). There's a son of his up in Maynooth with Maurice, and he told them the other day in a letter that Maurice bested the world at the examinations, and that 'tis how they're all prophesying he'll be something great yet—a bishop, maybe, or something very high.

Michael. That's wonderful news, surely (*taking off his hat reverently*). Thanks be to the Almighty God!

Owen. Bride will be every bit as proud of it as ourselves.

Mrs. O'Connor. What I was saying a minute ago, Michael, was, that 'tis you have the good right in all earnest to be the proud man this day.

Michael (*after a pause*). God is very good to us. . . . There's no doubt but the priest was a great prophet after all. He said, and Maurice only that height (*illustrating with his hand*), that 'twould be that way with him some day.

Mrs. O'Connor (*a little envious*). Our Patrick is a fright, too, at the books. 'Tis like a miracle the way everything comes to him. But Jimmy has no stomach at all for the learning. He's like the father's people that way.

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, sure what is he but a child yet? (*Undoing one of the parcels.*) This is the suit, I suppose? What kind is it? (*Owen goes into parlour.*)

Michael. 'Tis all right.

Mrs. Harte. You must try the coat on you before you sit down, Michael.

Michael (*ungraciously*). Yeh, give us a bit to eat first! There's plenty time for that.

Mrs. Harte (*persuasively*). 'Twon't take half a

minute. I'd like greatly to have Mary see it on you.

Michael. Yeh, what nonsense, woman? They'll do finely.

Mrs. Harte. Wisha, glory be to goodness, what work you're making about it! You're the queer man to be so black in yourself and we having such tidings before you.

Mrs. O'Connor. Wisha, Ellen, don't mind. Maybe the poor man is tired.

Mrs. Harte. Yeh, not at all. What 'ud be making him tired? Come, Michael. Do. (*Unfolds the coat and holds it up to him.*)

Michael (*yielding*). Very well, then. I suppose 'tis as good to be done with it.

He takes off his coat and tries on the new one, Mrs. Harte assisting the while. She smooths it down very carefully.

Michael. Well?

Mrs. Harte (*critically*). 'Tis a fine fit entirely. Come here, Mary, and look at the stuff.

Mrs. O'Connor (*examining it closely*). 'Tis elegant.

Mrs. Harte. I got it a great bargain. A remnant it was.

Mrs. O'Connor. 'Tis for all the world like what Mr. Armstrong, the land commissioner, had on him and he here Lady Day.

Mrs. Harte. 'Twill look very respectable when he'll have everything to match. Turn round, Michael, this way.

Michael (*turning round*). Well?

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis grand out—if it wouldn't be a small bit tight there round the collar?

Michael. Yeh, that's nothing. 'Twill stretch.

Mrs. O'Connor. Sure, you could remove that upper button yourself, Ellen? 'Twould ease it a bit.

Michael (*with a hint of eagerness*). Wouldn't it be

a lot safer for the tailor to do the like o' that? Maybe 'tis only destroying the coat she'd be meddling with it. 'Tis likely we'll see some one going east that would take it to him?

Mrs. Harte. Yes, an' sure as day never get it back in time for your journey! Isn't it long enough he kept them from you. (*Holding up overcoat.*) I'd like to see this on you now.

Mrs. O'Connor (*with conviction*). Well, isn't it grand entirely it looks on him? And so comfortable? *Years younger* you're looking this minute, Michael.

Michael (*sceptically*). Wisha, I don't know.

Mrs. O'Connor. God knows you are, Michael!

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis elegant it looks on you—elegant. When Maurice'll set his eyes on you Sunday 'tis a great start he'll get. . . . Well, there's no doubt in the world but there's a lot in clothes. Walk over towards the door.

He is about to do so when he suddenly catches sight of the priest coming towards the house.

Michael (*excitedly*). Ellen, Ellen, the priest! (*Hurriedly unbuttoning overcoat.*) Laughing his sides he'd be at me and he to see me like this. What a time he should come!

Mrs. Harte. Take care, or 'tis how you'll tear it!

He gets out of his overcoat, which he flings on the table, and hurries into the parlour.

Mrs. Harte (*following him with his old coat*). Here, take this with you.

Mrs. O'Connor (*in dismay*). An' glory be to God, look at the way I am before him! I wouldn't have him see me with this apron on me for all the world.

Mrs. Harte. You'll find one o' mine in the room above.

Mrs. O'Connor. I'd rather not be meeting him and I in this state. I'll slip out, by the way not seeing him at all.

Mrs. O'Connor goes out. Mrs. Harte tidies up the room, flicking imaginary dust off tables and chairs. She leaves the parcels on the table with the overcoat carefully folded on top. Owen returns to the kitchen.

Mrs. Harte (*to Owen.*) 'Tis for that card for the ordination he's coming surely, and I don't know under heaven where I put that letter. I'm half blind from looking for it. You didn't see e'er a sign of it, I suppose?

Owen. Oh, sure I took it with me. I was anxious like for Bride to see it. I didn't know you were looking for it. (*Takes out letter from inner breast pocket of his coat, and gives her the two cards, retaining the letter.*) Here they're for you.

Mrs. Harte (*relieved*). Oh, thanks be to God! 'Twas troubling me in a fright, as I couldn't find them.

Father Mangan comes in. He looks unusually grave. He has an open letter crushed in his hand.

Mrs. Harte (*effusively*). Welcome, Father.

Father Mangan. Is Michael at home, Mrs. Harte?

Mrs. Harte. He is, Father. He went down the room there this minute. (*Calls.*) Michael, Michael.

Michael (*from room*). Just half a minute, Ellen.

Mrs. Harte (*going to the door and opening it*). Hurry, can't you, and don't be keeping the priest. He's here to settle everything about your going.

Michael returns dressed as usual.

Michael (*heartily*). Good evening, Father. 'Tis early you got home from the Conference. There must be a good bit o' breeding in that new little cob of yours.

Father Mangan. I'm very sorry, Michael, to be the bearer of rather disappointing news this evening.

Michael. What news, Father?

Father Mangan. I've got a note here from the

President of Maynooth. He says that Maurice, poor fellow, is not—eh—quite well for the last day or two.

Mrs. Harte (*troubled*). Is it sick he is, Father?

Father Mangan. Ye—s, a—a kind of—of breakdown from overstudy.

Owen. And no wonder at all! Sure no one could stand it.

Mrs. Harte (*half bitterly*). 'Tisn't once or twice I warned him how 'twould be with him.

Father Mangan. The unfortunate part of it is that the authorities have been obliged to—to postpone his ordination—but merely for a little time, of course.

Mrs. Harte (*with a gasp*). What's that you say, Father?

Michael. That's terrible, Father.

Father Mangan. 'Tis a great disappointment, Michael, to us all. . . . I can't tell you how I feel myself this moment over it.

Mrs. Harte (*struggling with her fears*). He must be very bad, and they to do the like o' that to him?

Owen. And it must be awful sudden, Father, and to say we had that letter (*producing Maurice's letter*) less than a week ago?

Father Mangan. It *was* very sudden, Owen—alarmingly so. (*To Mrs. Harte.*) There is no use in keeping the truth from you. Dr. Hynes, the President, says the poor fellow is seriously ill.

Mrs. Harte. Blessed Mother o' God!

Michael. You're keeping something from us, Father?

Father Mangan. 'Tis always better, Michael, to—to be prepared for the worst.

Mrs. Harte (*crying out wildly*). My God, 'tis dead he is surely! Christ in Heaven pity us this day!

Father Mangan. Mrs. Harte——

Mrs. Harte (*distracted*). God of Heaven, only to think of him dying with no one but the strangers about him!

Owen (*appealingly*). Mother . . . don't!

Mrs. Harte. Son o' God, isn't it terrible, terrible altogether! My boy to be lying dead, and not one of his own to know it at all. *A Mhuire! Mhuire! Mhuire!*

Father Mangan (*half angrily*). Woman, are you mad? . . . Your son is *not* dead. Who told you he was?

Michael. Is—is that the truth, Father?

Father Mangan. It *is* the truth, of course. He's no more dead than yourself. He's ill—he's not quite himself—that's all.

Michael (*fervently*). God bless you for that word, Father.

Father Mangan. The doctors ordered him home at once. Complete rest is what they prescribed. He has left the College this morning. He'll be here any minute now.

Michael (*thunderstruck*). What's that you say, Father? *Here? Here,* is it?

Father Mangan. There are two students—special friends of his—with him. One of them is my nephew. They'll do everything possible for the poor fellow on the way. Rest assured of that, Michael.

Mrs. Harte. And what time is this to be telling us this terrible news, Father, and you knowing, as well as ourselves, how all the friends are looking to have him say Mass in the chapel below, Sunday week, and it settled with yourself to have him say the marriage words for his brother here the week after?

Father Mangan (*with a hint of annoyance*). I assure you, poor woman, 'tis no fault of mine. I had left for the Conference before the post arrived, and I hurried down the moment I got this letter.

Mrs. Harte. 'Tis the heart-breaking story you always bring with you!

Michael (*reproachfully*). Hush, Ellen, hush! (*To Father Mangan.*) Don't mind her, Father. She don't mean it at all.

Father Mangan. I understand her feelings, poor woman. I have no blame whatever to her. None, indeed.

Mrs. Harte is seen to throw a big shawl about her as if to go out.

Owen. Where are you going, mother?

Mrs. Harte. I'm going where I'd be gone many an hour this morning if them that ought to know better hadn't treated me worse than a beggar on the road! . . . 'Tis the cold home-coming for him and he dying, surely.

Father Mangan (*persuasively*). Wait a minute?

Mrs. Harte. No, Father, I can't.

Father Mangan. One moment only?

She makes no answer, but goes resolutely towards the open door.

Father Mangan (*laying his hand restrainingly on her arm.* Stop! Stop, I say!

Mrs. Harte. Take your hand off me, Father. Let me go to my boy. . . Oh, Maurice, Maurice!

Michael (*in a low voice*). For God's sake, Ellen, can't you do as the priest bids you? Sure, it isn't his fault at all.

Owen. Wait, mother. Wait, can't you?

Father Mangan (*earnestly*). Listen, Mrs. Harte—I speak for your good. Your boy's illness is such that if you go to him in this agitated condition you may do him a hurt from which he may never recover. As you love your son keep calm and collected.

Mrs. Harte. I don't care! I don't care! I'll go.

Owen (*barring her way*). You won't go, mother.

Mrs. Harte (*sobbing wildly*). I must! I must! I must!

Michael goes to her. He appeals to her in a low tone of mingled pain and reproach.

Michael. 'Tis a shame for you, Ellen, after the priest's words. 'Tis mad you are! . . . (*Persuasively.*) Sit down there (*pointing to a stool*), and be said by the priest. Do, Ellen. Do.

She hesitates.

Owen (*appealingly*). Do, mother.

Father Mangan. Do, Mrs. Harte, like a good woman. Do, I beg of you. (*Consulting his watch.*) He'll be with you now any moment.

She sits down without speaking. The shawl slips from her shoulder and falls to the ground. She makes no effort to replace it.

Father Mangan. That's right, my poor woman, that's right. . . . And now that we're all more—more resigned to this—this very painful disappointment, 'tis but right——

He is interrupted by the noise of a hurried footstep approaching the door. They all look in the direction of the doorway with questioning anxiety.

Father Mangan. Peter!—and alone?

He hastens to meet a young clerical student who appears in the doorway. They shake hands very quietly.

Father Mangan (*wonderingly*). Where is he, Peter?

Peter (*slightly out of breath*). In the covered car with a friend. They're coming round by the lane. I just ran up the short cut through the fields to have a word with you all first.

Michael. How is he, Mr. Mangan?

Peter. Oh, better, Mr. Harte—much better—but very tired, of course.

Father Mangan. The long train journey is exhausting.

Peter. Oh, fearfully. (*To Michael.*) Our President, Dr. Hynes, gave me particular instructions to tell you in person how deeply sorry he is. The awful suddenness of the whole thing prevented him acquainting you earlier. And he thought the kindest way to let you know was through my uncle.

Michael. We're very thankful, indeed, to the good gentleman, Mr. Mangan, an' tell him so.

Peter. I can assure you it was almost as great a disappointment to Dr. Hynes as to yourselves. You could hardly understand how grieved he was. Maurice, poor chap, had done such brilliant things, he was to be attached to the Dunboyne after his ordination. 'Twas desperately hard luck. Everyone got a most painful shock.

Father Mangan. Poor lad! Poor lad! (*Mrs. Harte tries to stifle a sob.*)

Peter (*touched*). Oh, don't take it like that, Mrs. Harte. There are very good grounds for believing it to be only a temporary thing. . . . Pray, don't. 'Twould upset him awfully to see you taking it so much to heart. A month or two at home——

Michael (*puzzled*). What kind o' complaint did the doctors say he was suffering from, Mr. Mangan?

Owen. He was very thin and white at Easter. . . . And coughing. 'Tisn't in a decline he is?

Michael. He was saying that was only after the long fast o' Lent.

Father Mangan vainly endeavours to catch his nephew's eye.

Peter (*to Father Mangan, turning round in full*). I—I thought you told them.

Father Mangan (*awkwardly.*) Yes, yes, so I did—of course in—in a general way. I was about to enter into details just as you came in.

Mrs. Harte (*distractedly*). In the name o' God, what mystery is it that ye have between ye? . . .

Is it some disgrace that's after coming upon us or what?

Peter. *Disgrace?* No, indeed, Mrs. Harte.

As he speaks a car arrives at the door. Maurice, assisted by his companion, another young student, is seen to alight.

Father Mangan (*to Mrs. Harte*). Stay there a moment. And for God's sake try to control yourself.

He advances to meet Maurice.

Father Mangan (*with excessive heartiness*). Welcome home, Maurice! Welcome, a thousand times, my dear fellow!

Maurice (*half inaudibly*). Oh, yes—yes. . . . Yes—yes. . . . Thanks. . . . Thanks.

He passes into the centre of the apartment. Peter and his fellow student are seen to converse for a moment in whispers with Father Mangan, and then go away very quietly.

Mrs. Harte (*tenderly*). Maurice? . . . How are you, my poor boy? . . . What happened you at all? (*He smiles wearily and mutters something in an undertone.*) Don't be troubled one bit. We're well content to wait. We are, indeed, Maurice. (*With forced cheerfulness.*) Sure what signifies a month or two—or, for the matter of that, a whole year?

He gives a profound sigh, and looks at her somewhat strangely.

Michael (*bringing him a chair*). You're dead tired, boy, after the long journey. Sit here, Maurice. Your mother'll have a bit to eat for you this minute.

Maurice sits down wearily. Father Mangan draws a chair beside him. As the priest speaks he gives you the impression of one striving desperately to be natural.

Father Mangan. By the bye, Maurice (*placing his*

hand on his shoulder), and how is my old friend, Tom Morgan—Dr. Morgan, you know? We read together in the sixties. Boon companions, Tom and I, in those days.

Maurice. Dr. Morgan? Dr.? . . . Yes—yes. . . .

Father Mangan. Ah, a rare genius, Tom! A profound thinker, and a brilliant theologian, Maurice. . . But a child at heart for all his wisdom. A Kempis we nicknamed him. Of course you read his work on the Immaculate Conception? A great thing that. . . And he's wearing well, you tell me? Ah, a fine fellow, Tom Morgan. A fine fellow, Maurice.

Maurice sits gazing intently into the heart of the fire. In his profound absorption he seems dead to externals. Mrs. Harte approaches as if to speak. The priest stands up very quietly, and motions her to leave him undisturbed. They all speak in half-whispers and look at one another piteously.

Father Mangan (*to Mrs. Harte*). A cup of hot tea. . . . Quickly as you can.

Mrs. Harte takes Michael's overcoat from the table and hangs it up, sighing deeply. There is something inexpressibly touching in the action. She removes each of the other parcels slowly one by one. There is a tragic significance in every movement. As she spreads the tablecloth Maurice is heard suddenly speaking to himself in a voice and manner startling in their indefinable strangeness.

Maurice. I can't! I can't, mother! . . . I'll wear the flesh off my bones. . . . A life of sacrilege. . . . Would you, would you, Father?

There is a great silence. Maurice drops suddenly into the same attitude of absorption and aloofness as before. The priest goes to Mrs. Harte and tries to break the spell that seems to hold her. As he speaks to her, Maurice is seen to open his breviary, and to

read a portion of the day's Office. His voice, as he reads, is an audible whisper.

Michael (*in a low voice that hides a sob*). His mind that's gone, Father.

Father Mangan (*in the same low tone*). No, Michael. It is only a temporary breakdown. Overstrung nerves. It happens every day.

Michael. 'Twas wrong to force him the way we did.

Father Mangan. Hush, Michael. How could anyone have foreseen this?

Michael (*piteously*). 'Tis the punishment of the Almighty on us. I know it.

Father Mangan. No, no, Michael. Don't think that. . . . How could you have known?

Owen (*to himself, desolately*). She'll never come into this house now.

Father Mangan. Have sense, man, have sense.

Owen. She won't, Father. . . . Never.

Maurice is seen to rise from the chair abstractedly. With his eyes deep in the book, and still reciting fragments of his office in fitful whispers, he goes out the open door very slowly.

Father Mangan (*in a low voice*). Follow him, Michael. (*Michael goes out.*)

Mrs. Harte (*tottering towards a seat*). My God! My God! My God!

The priest looks at her with a pained sense of his own helplessness. The curtain falls very slowly.

Maurice Harte was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in June, 1912, by the Abbey Theatre Company, under the direction of Mr Lennox Robinson, with the following cast:—

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Ellen Harte	Sara Allgood
Maurice	Fred O'Donovan
Owen	J. A. O'Rourke
Mrs O'Connor	Eileen O'Doherty
Father Mangan	Sydney J. Morgan
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